

STATE OF LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR

Head Start in Louisiana
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

January 13, 1999

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Legislative Auditor

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Head Start in Louisiana

January 13, 1999



**Office of the Legislative Auditor
State of Louisiana**

**Daniel G. Kyle, Ph.D., CPA, CFE
Legislative Auditor**

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January 13, 1999

THE HONORABLE JOHN J. HAINKEL, JR.,
CHAIRMAN, AND MEMBERS OF THE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

THE HONORABLE THOMAS A. "TOM" GREENE,
CHAIRMAN, AND MEMBERS OF THE
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Transmitted herewith is our report on Head Start in Louisiana. Our examination was conducted in accordance with Title 24 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes and was performed at the request of the Senate Finance and Education committees.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel G. Kyle".

Daniel G. Kyle, CPA, CFE
Legislative Auditor

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Head Start in Louisiana

BACKGROUND

Head Start is a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (DHHS). In Louisiana, 45 individual grantees receive funding under this program and administer the program locally. Of these, 11 are school boards and the remaining are community action agencies, local municipalities, or nonprofit agencies.

Upon learning of the impending review of selected grantees, the DHHS Regional Office in Dallas, Texas, sent a letter to the Legislative Auditor which, in part, summarized the program as follows:

Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood program for low-income children and their families. . . . The overall goal of the Head Start Program is to bring about a greater degree of social competence in children of low-income families. By social competence is meant the child's everyday effectiveness in dealing with both the present environment and later responsibilities in school and life. Social competence takes into account the interrelatedness of cognitive and intellectual development, physical and mental health, nutritional needs and other factors that enable a developmental approach to helping children achieve social competence.

For the purposes of our review, we selected both urban and rural programs. The information contained in this report was obtained from nine grantees as follows:

- Caddo Community Action Agency
- Total Community Action Agency of Orleans Parish
- East Baton Rouge Parish
- Ascension Parish School Board
- Jefferson Community Action Program
- Pointe Coupee Community Advancement
- Tensas Parish School Board
- Pine Belt Multi-Purpose Agency, encompassing Bienville, Jackson, Red River, and Winn parishes
- Vernon Parish School Board

At each agency, we interviewed Head Start teachers, administrators, and other staff to determine the goals and methods employed by the program, with emphasis on the program for four-year-olds. This included reviews of the enrollment process, the educational components of the program, and other services provided by Head Start. Furthermore, we examined the expenditures of each grantee during fiscal years ended 1995, 1996, and 1997. We also compiled the salary ranges of administrators, coordinators, teachers, and teacher aides. Finally, to obtain some measures of performance, we interviewed 46 kindergarten teachers and examined kindergarten assessment exams in 12 parishes.

ENROLLMENT

Recruitment efforts begin early in the calendar year for the fall enrollment. Flyers and similar advertisements are distributed in the community to promote awareness of the program. Applications are screened with each applicant having to provide a proof of income (e.g., Form 1040, listing of food stamp benefits, etc.), the child's birth certificate, social security number, and documentation of medical insurance. Once the registration process is completed, medical and dental screenings begin.

New applicants are screened primarily based on family income, though special needs children may be given a higher priority than others. The Head Start guidelines allow grantees to reserve up to 10% of the enrollment for children whose families do not meet the designated income ceilings. This 10% allowance is typically used to enroll children with special needs such as handicaps or problems in the home, regardless of income level. The remaining enrollment, however, must meet the following income ceilings:

<u>Size of Family Unit</u>	<u>Income</u>
1	\$8,050
2	10,850
3	13,650
4	16,450
5	19,250
6	22,050
7	24,850
8	27,650

(For family units with more than eight members, add \$2,800 for each additional member.)

[A family is defined as all persons living in the same household who are supported by the income of the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the child enrolling or participating in the program.]

CURRICULUM

Head Start does not require grantees to apply common educational goals to all students. Independent of Head Start, the grantees we examined have developed learning themes to guide teachers. These themes are expanded once each month and may be divided into several broad categories:

- Language - for example, recognition of familiar words and the spelling of the child's name
- Math - counting from 1 to 10; concepts such as smallest/largest
- Colors - eight basic colors
- Shape - circle, square, triangle, etc.
- Time Concept - breakfast time/lunch time, now/later
- Self Concept - name recognition, understanding rules, recognizing differences, etc.
- Position Concept - above/below, near/far, etc.
- Individual Strengths - manipulate crayons, button coat, open and pour milk, etc.

The teachers of the nine grantees we examined use structured play as the principle means of instruction. Themes such as counting, months, and days of the week are incorporated into songs and discussions early in the school day. In addition, the agencies we examined typically employ eight standard learning centers where the children play for one to two hours each day. The learning centers are:

- Prewriting - tracing letters or using writing instruments
- Art - painting, coloring, and cutting to develop fine motor skills
- Blocks - construct and build
- Dramatic Play/Housekeeping - household and other items for the children to play with; an iron or a fireman's helmet
- Library - exposure to books and magazines
- Science - plants, magnets, etc.
- Music - songs and stories on audio
- Sand/Water - items to pour and measure

FAMILY SERVICES

The families of Head Start children are provided additional services by the program. Head Start pays for medical and dental services for the children that are not covered by Medicaid or private insurance. In addition, the grantees provide referral services to the children's families for a variety of needs such as housing, utilities, clothing, education, medical, and job services.

PERFORMANCE

We discussed the preparedness of Head Start children with 46 kindergarten teachers in 12 parishes throughout the state. The experience level of these teachers ranged from 4 to 34 years, and averaged 18 years. We asked each of these teachers a series of questions regarding the Head Start program and its effectiveness in preparing children for kindergarten:

- **Are Head Start children generally prepared for kindergarten socially and behaviorally?**
39.1% reported high degrees of preparedness
17.4% believed these children displayed low levels of preparedness
34.8% reported moderate preparedness
8.7% did not respond to this question
- **Are Head Start children generally prepared for kindergarten in terms of motor skills?**
26.1% reported high levels of preparation
17.4% responded that preparedness was low
47.8% found preparation to be moderate
8.7% did not respond to this question
- **Do Head Start children generally know basic colors?**
89.1% stated the children generally do know basic colors
6.5% responded that the children generally do not know basic colors
4.3% did not respond to this question
- **Do Head Start children generally know the basic shapes?**
89.1% stated the children generally do know basic shapes
8.7% responded that the children generally do not know basic shapes
2.2% did not respond to this question
- **Are Head Start children generally familiar with the alphabet?**
63.0% gave an affirmative response
34.8% replied in the negative
2.2% did not answer
- **Are Head Start children generally familiar with numbers?**
60.9% responded affirmatively
30.4% responded negatively
8.7% had no response

- **Could the Head Start program add or change anything to perform more effectively?**

The most common responses volunteered to this question may be categorized as follows:

28.3%, greater emphasis on communication and coordination with local public schools

28.3%, greater emphasis on academics

21.7%, additional training and/or education for Head Start teachers

13.0%, increased emphasis on motor skills

13.0%, more structure

13.0%, more emphasis relating to speech

In addition to interviews with kindergarten teachers, we examined the kindergarten assessment scores taken at the start of the 1998-1999 school year in 12 parishes. We subsequently identified those children who attended Head Start as well as those who were on the program's "waiting list." Children on the waiting list consisted of those who had applied but were not serviced by the program. In addition, we noted the scores of the "other" children who were not Head Start participants nor waiting list children.

These comparisons are presented as percent of total possible raw scores for each assessment. In Louisiana, each school board uses one of four assessments for kindergarten children:

- CEA - the Chicago Early Assessment contains sections on gross motor skills, fine motor skills, language, visual discrimination, and memory.
- DSC - the Developing Skills Checklist contains mathematical concepts and five pre-reading sections (language, memory, visual, auditory, and print concepts).
- Dial-R - the Dial-R contains sections on motor skills, concepts, and language.
- Miller - the Miller Assessment is not divided into sections but is comparable to the other assessments in that it tests cognitive and motor skills.

	<u>Head Start</u>	<u>Waiting List</u>	<u>Other</u>
CEA	94.2	91.9	93.4
DSC	53.9	54.5	55.4
Dial-R	80.4	77.0	81.3
Miller	32.8	37.4*	32.4

*31.9 for those children from families under the Head Start income ceiling.

STAFFING

Each grantee has a single director who is assisted by specialists (coordinators). In addition, each director may have one or more administrative staff. Depending on enrollment size, each center has a number of teachers and teacher aides as well--Head Start guidelines limit the child-adult ratio to 10 to 1. As a result, a 20-member class with one teacher and one aide is common.

Although teachers do not have to be certified as required by the Louisiana Department of Education, those without degrees in Early Childhood Education are required to have the Child Development Association (CDA) credential at the time they are hired. Although teacher aides do not have to possess the credential at the time of hire, they are required to eventually obtain it. To acquire the CDA credential, a candidate must:

- Undergo professional observation of their work with children
- Have the parents of children with whom they work complete a questionnaire regarding their skills
- Write about their goals for children and how they plan to achieve them
- Compile a file of professional resources
- Take a written examination about the principles of developmentally appropriate practice
- Participate in an interview about their practices with children and families

Our review of the staff at each grantee revealed that all of the administrators, coordinators, teachers, and aides had high school degrees or equivalent. Education obtained by administrators, coordinators, teachers, and aides are as follows:

<u>Job Classification</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Associate Degree</u>	<u>Baccalaureate Degree</u>	<u>Masters Degree</u>
Directors	9	0.0%	22.2%	77.8%
Administrators	10	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Coordinators	68	16.2%	29.4%	11.8%
Teachers	321	7.8%	35.8%	1.9%
Teacher Aides	329	1.5%	3.0%	0.0%

COMPENSATION

We examined the payroll records of each of the nine grantees to determine the 1997 salary levels of directors, administrators, coordinators, teachers, and teacher aides. In addition to the level of gross pay, we determined the employer paid fringe benefits of each agency and added this to determine total compensation. Employer paid fringe benefits included Social Security, Medicare, retirement, health, and life insurance. Not included in total compensation was

unemployment benefits received by the staff during the summer months. We determined the average compensation to be as follows:

<u>Job Classification</u>	<u>Low Salary</u>	<u>High Salary</u>	<u>Average Salary</u>	<u>Average Benefits</u>	<u>Average Total Compensation</u>
Directors	\$20,642	\$68,264	\$38,844	\$5,207	\$44,051
Administrators	15,650	32,329	25,412	2,945	28,357
Coordinators	10,884	48,978	22,663	2,922	25,585
Teachers	6,350	26,380	15,001	2,046	17,047
Teacher Aides	3,051	22,088	10,851	1,490	12,341

FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

The Head Start grants in Louisiana have increased from a total of \$75,553,576 in 1995 to \$99,350,063 in 1997. The nine grantees included in our review received \$34,759,283 (34%) of the total grants awarded in the state. We reviewed the expenditures of each grantee by Head Start budget category and combined the agencies to present the composite below. Each percentage noted represents the percent of total expenditures.

<u>Expenditures</u>	<u>FYE 1995</u>	<u>FYE 1996</u>	<u>FYE 1997</u>
Personnel - salaries	56.1%	56.1%	55.6%
Fringe benefits	10.2%	11.9%	10.4%
Occupancy (rent and utilities)	5.0%	4.5%	3.1%
Travel	2.7%	1.8%	2.0%
Nutrition and food	1.3%	1.3%	1.7%
Furniture and equipment	4.9%	4.4%	5.8%
Supplies	6.5%	5.3%	4.9%
Other child services	1.1%	0.9%	2.3%
Other	11.7%	13.4%	13.5%
Indirect costs	<u>0.5%</u>	<u>0.4%</u>	<u>0.7%</u>
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

These grantees serviced 6,440 children in 1997 at an average cost of \$5,397 per child, excluding the grantees' required 20% portion of total funding. The cost per child by grantee is as follows:

<u>Grantee</u>	<u>Total Funding</u>	<u>Funded Enrollment</u>	<u>Cost per Child</u>
Caddo Community Action Agency	\$5,090,430	1,037	\$4,909
Total Community Action Agency	14,216,396	1,870	7,602
East Baton Rouge Parish	6,032,410	1,322	4,563
Ascension Parish School Board	866,887	214	4,051
Jefferson Community Action Program	4,862,475	1,109	4,385
Pointe Coupee Community Advancement	664,618	150	4,431
Tensas Parish School Board	419,616	85	4,937
Pine-Belt Multi-Purpose Agency	1,488,807	370	4,024
Vernon Parish School Board	1,117,644	283	3,949
Total	<u>\$34,759,283</u>	<u>6,440</u>	

SUMMARY

There are 45 individual Head Start grantees in Louisiana that received a total of \$99,350,063 in federal funding in 1997. For the nine grantees we examined, the cost per child served in 1997 ranged from \$3,949 to \$7,602, with an average cost per child of \$5,397. As stated in the report, these amounts do not include the required 20% match by each grantee. Program eligibility is primarily based on family income, though there are considerations for children with special needs.

Although Head Start has not adopted a specific curriculum, the grantees we examined have developed similar learning themes to serve as a guide for instruction. We asked 46 kindergarten teachers what changes in the program would make it more effective. The two most common responses were (1) more emphasis on communication and coordination with the public schools, and (2) more emphasis on academics.